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Startling Results Of A Recent Gender Parity Survey Draw A New Frame Around An Old Picture

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It’s puzzling with the vast amount of research demonstrating how corporations stand to financially benefit from achieving gender parity in their top-most ranks, very few companies in the United States have actually made gender diversity in the boardroom and C-suite a top priority. In fact, in the S&P 500, “only 17” companies have 40% or more women on their boards. A recent survey of more than 500 U.S. business executives commissioned by the Women’s Forum of New York has shed new light on the issue – a disproportionate number of women executives recognize the “problem of gender parity” versus men executives who don’t believe there is a problem.

At first glance, incongruences between men and women about the status of gender equality may seem conspicuous. But it isn’t until we take a closer look at these new survey results that we truly start to understand how the stark differences between the way male business executives and their female counterparts perceive gender parity—especially in the boardroom and C-suite—reinforce the glass ceiling and stagnate the advancement of women to the highest-ranking corporate leadership positions.

According to the survey, only half of all business executives believe gender inequality in the boardroom is a problem, and among those who do, an overwhelming majority are women (74%) versus men (43%).

Another area where the survey showed a significant divergence between men and women executives was whether or not there were enough women leaders in the pipeline for companies to achieve boardroom diversity. A preponderance of the women executives surveyed (72%) reported that they believed there was a sufficient number of women leaders available to reach gender parity, while men executives (49%) were far less likely to agree. This is particularly concerning given that reaching gender parity at the board and C-suite level requires that executives actively seek out women for leadership roles. This becomes an increasingly elusive goal if top leaders erroneously believe the proverbial well is dry. Perhaps one of the most shocking survey results was that twice the number of men than women believed that gender equality in the boardroom and C-suite *had already been achieved*. This glaring lack of understanding contributes to the barriers that women still face today.

The Huffington Post-Startling Results of a Recent Gender Parity Survey

While it's easy to assume that such an alarming disparity reflects a lack of understanding or an unwillingness of men to recognize the potential contributions women can make to corporations, in reality, many of these decisions are the results of *unconscious bias*. Without even knowing it, both men and women can perpetuate a cycle of inequality simply because of learned behaviors. Preconceived ideas about what leadership "should" look like and who ought to occupy certain roles often is at the root of gender inequality in the workplace. Though this behavior is often unintentional, it is just as detrimental to women's path to the boardroom.

Beyond just understanding these problems, concrete steps toward solving them need to be taken. That means ensuring senior executives, regardless of gender, are taking individual responsibility for creating opportunities for gender diversity. Yet the survey showed that may be a steeper climb than we may have anticipated. Results indicated that less than half of men executives (48%) believe they have any obligation to help women achieve gender parity in the boardroom. Conversely, women executives (61%) believe they have a personal responsibility to help women achieve gender parity in the boardroom. In order to make a significant change in the corporate structure it's imperative that we collapse this divide.

Thankfully, there is one place that consensus exists among business executives: *the bottom line*. The survey reflects that gender parity in the boardroom strategically makes sense to sustain profitability. In fact, the survey showed that overwhelmingly the number of executives (78%) agreed that *parity in the boardroom was good for business*. Yet this result is patently counterintuitive to the rest of the survey outcomes, as the majority of men do not see gender parity as a priority! The lack of gender parity in the boardroom and C-suite is costing corporations money - a price paid by shareholders and unfortunately, a price paid by women not being at the boardroom table. While there seems to be a long road ahead for women to achieve parity at the top, there is a solution in sight! A number of senior executives are taking the bull by the horns, or staring it down, as the "Fearless Girl" does, the statue that State Street Global Advisors installed by the Wall Street Bull on this year's International Women's Day. Initiatives like these increase awareness about the absence of women on boards and C-suite levels, raise the corporate stakes for those in leadership, and challenge individuals to step up to make diversity a primary strategic business objective. The first step to solving any problem is recognizing there is a problem! This is why we need data like the Women's Forum of New York's new survey, which puts the issues in perspective and helps educate top decision-makers about the challenges to bridge the gap between the different perceptions between men and women. The reality is clear - with 80% of the board seats filled by men, there is an equality problem!

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SURVEY | WOMEN'S FORUM BUSINESS EXECUTIVES

Female business executives are significantly more likely than male business executives to agree **GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE BOARDROOM** is **A PROBLEM**.

74% 43%

Less than half of male business executives agree that they have a **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HELPING ACHIEVE GENDER PARITY** in the boardroom, significantly less than female business executives.

64% 48%

Male business executives are significantly more likely than female business executives to report **GENDER PARITY IN BOARDROOMS HAS ALREADY HAPPENED**.

30% 15%

Almost half of male business executives agree that there are **NOT ENOUGH WOMEN LEADERS** to have boardroom diversity at companies, a significantly lower portion than of female business executives who agree.

49% 72%

Female business executives are significantly more likely than male business executives to indicate **COMPANY CULTURE** and the perception women are more **COMMITTED TO OWN FAMILY** than work are **MAJOR BARRIERS** for women to be considered for boardroom positions.

COMPANY CULTURE 57% 39%

COMMITTED TO OWN FAMILY 41% 29%

Male business executives are significantly more likely than female business executives to report they **DON'T THINK** there are **ANY MAJOR BARRIERS FOR WOMEN** to be considered for boardroom positions.

27% 17%

ABOUT THE SURVEY
Methodology: The survey was conducted by the Women's Forum for America, a non-profit organization, from July 15-22, 2014. The survey was conducted online and included 1,000 business executives, 500 male and 500 female, who were randomly selected from a list of 10,000 business executives. The survey was conducted in English and the results are based on the responses of those who completed the survey.